

U.S. and Russian nuclear forces leaves open the possibility that, by continuing to maintain those nuclear forces that will not be operationally deployed under the Moscow Treaty on so-called hair trigger alert status, we increase the chances of an accidental or mistaken launch of nuclear weapons or, worse still, provide additional vulnerability to terrorist who might seek to hack into our nuclear command and control system and launch weapons.

I was pleased to note that the report of the Foreign Relations Committee on this treaty addresses the concerns that the alert status issue creates for crisis stability raised by former Senator Nunn, and the suggestion made by Gen. Eugene Habiger, the former Commander in Chief of U.S. Strategic Command that "We may have to find a way to move more weapons off alert status".

What are the views of the Senator from Delaware and the Senator from Indiana on this issue, and the desirability of moving nuclear weapons off alert status?

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I think that the new relationship between the United States and Russia can only be improved by taking nuclear weapons off alert status. By giving decision makers more time to react to disturbing information, this would lower the risk of a nuclear war caused by one side's mistaken belief that the other was attacking it. I am especially impressed, moreover, by the fact that Gen. Eugene Habiger, former Commander in Chief of the U.S. Strategic Command feels that the time has come to do this. I would note, however, that General Habiger warned that existing specific de-alerting proposals were often not viable.

Mr. LUGAR. During our hearings on the treaty, a number of witnesses expressed concern about the alert status of U.S. strategic nuclear warheads. As the United States and Russia enter a new era of friendship and cooperation, we must take a close look at what we can do, in a safe and effective manner, to take nuclear weapons off alert status and prevent an accidental nuclear launch due to a false alarm or a miscalculation. I know our friend and former colleague Senator Sam Nunn expressed hope in our hearings that we might address the cold war-era nuclear postures of the United States and Russia as a critical next step following ratification of the Moscow Treaty.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. In addition to recommending an "immediate shutdown" in the alert status of the nuclear forces reduced under this treaty, it is my understanding that in his testimony, General Habiger also suggested that a system to take weapons off alert status in ways that make sense, are transparent, and do not compromise our security be designed by teams by people who actually build the weapons.

Given this commonsense recommendation—and the failure of the

treaty to address this question—I would like to ask the Senator what action he would recommend the Senate take to make General Habiger's suggestion a reality? What measures, if any, does he plan to address this issue in an appropriate manner this Congress?

Mr. BIDEN. The Foreign Relations Committee's report encourages the President to establish a commission of weapon system experts to undertake the review that General Habiger proposed. It adds that if the President does not do so, Congress could usefully act on its own, either to establish such a commission or, perhaps, to commission the National Academy of Sciences to set up such a group.

Mr. LUGAR. The Senator from Delaware is correct, and while we have not determined precisely how to proceed, I expect that we will want to encourage action by the President before we move on our own. Such a measure could be offered as an amendment to major legislation such as the Department of State authorization bill.

I can say with confidence that Senator Biden and I are agreed that we should continue to pursue this initiative in ways that will provide productive results.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. I thank the Senator from the Delaware and the Senator from Indiana for their leadership and hard work on this issue, and I look forward to continuing to work with him, on additional legislation, if need be, to pursue this initiative.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise to engage the distinguished leadership of the Foreign Relations Committee in a colloquy.

Mr. President, for the past several years I have been increasingly concerned about the "loose nuke" threat presented by the Russian Federation's arsenal of non-strategic or "tactical" nuclear warheads. Unlike strategic nuclear forces, intermediate range nuclear forces, or even conventional forces in Europe, tactical nuclear arms are not covered by any arms control treaty. There are no formal negotiated limits of any kind, no way to hold current and future Russian leaders to the unfulfilled promises of steep reductions made by former Soviet President Gorbachev and former Russian President Yeltsin more than a decade ago. In fact, we do not even have a good estimate of how many tactical warheads Russia has because the United States has no inspection rights. Unclassified estimates of the current Russian stockpile have ranged widely, from 7,000 warheads to 18,000 warheads—four to eleven times as many as the United States. I am very troubled by the insufficient security at Russian nuclear warhead storage facilities and al Qaida's known interest in acquiring these horrific weapons. Am I right to understand that my colleagues share this concern?

Mr. LUGAR. I share the concern voiced by the senior Senator from North Dakota on the potential pro-

liferation threats posed by non-strategic nuclear weapons in Russia. As the Senator knows, the United States has voiced serious concerns about the safety and security of these dangerous weapons stored at multiple locations around Russia. I believe the Russian tactical nuclear weapons arsenal represents an area of concern and needs attention.

Mr. BIDEN. I agree with the Senator from North Dakota and the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator LUGAR. During hearings last year on the Treaty of Moscow now before the Senate, several of our distinguished witnesses mentioned Russia's tactical nuclear stockpile, including former Senator Nunn. The smaller size and greater number of these weapons puts them at higher risk for theft by, or illicit sale to, terror networks such as al-Qaida.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank my colleagues, who perhaps remember that in 1998 I authored legislation passed by Congress that identified Russia's tactical nuclear stockpile as a serious proliferation threat and called for United States pressure on Russia for real reductions. I was therefore disappointed that a requirement for Russian tactical warhead dismantlement and United States inspection rights were not part of the Treaty of Moscow. The disconnect between the ability of the United States to maintain current strategic force levels almost indefinitely, and Russia's inevitable strategic nuclear decline due to economic realities, gave our side enormous leverage that I believe we should have used to win Russian concessions on tactical nuclear arms. While I am encouraged that the resolution of ratification before us includes a declaration on accurate accounting and security, it does not mention Russian tactical nuclear reductions. I have prepared a corrective amendment and would welcome the support of the chairman and ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. LUGAR. I thank the Senator from North Dakota for his work on this important issue and his thoughtful invitation. I would ask that the Senator from North Dakota withhold his amendment with the understanding that the Foreign Relations Committee will make a serious effort to elevate the matter of Russian tactical nuclear weapons to a top priority on our Nation's arms control and threat reduction agenda.

Mr. CONRAD. Would the chairman and ranking member be willing to hold hearings in the coming months focusing on the threats associated with Russia's tactical nuclear stockpile? Furthermore, would the chairman and ranking member be willing to join me in urging the President to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce the Russian tactical threat, including making Russian tactical warhead reductions a priority in our dealings with the Russian Federation?